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RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000565

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STATE PASS OPIC FOR ZHAN AND MSTUCKART
DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY
WARSAW FOR LISA PIASCIK
CIUDAD JUAREZ FOR DONNA BLAIR
ISTANBUL FOR TASHAWNA SMITH
SAO PAULO FOR ANDREW WITHERSPOON

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVE ARGUES MASS VOTER
EDUCATION IS KEY

REF: LAGOS 392

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Classified By: Acting Consul General Donald McConnell for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Civil society activist Abiodun Aremu of the United Action for Democracy (UAD) told Poloff there was a failure to protest the April elections because of sparse voter education and widespread apathy toward the elections and politics in general. Aremu contended that civil society should engage the populace with mass voter education. Voter education would compel the public to make local governments accountable for their daily actions, and involve a previously disenfranchised public. Aremu did not believe civil society had failed to protest the election effectively, but the outbursts of protest which had occurred were a result of their work with voters. End summary.

April Elections Showed a Need to Engage the Populace

¶2. (U) Abiodun Aremu, a UAD spokesperson with 25 years of experience in civil society, in a conversation with Poloff on July 20 reviewed the April elections from civil society's perspective. The UAD is an umbrella organization of 40 civil society groups with the two goals of supporting multi-party democracy and resisting all forms of dictatorship, Aremu said. In 1997 UAD separated from the Campaign for Democracy and Olisa Agbakoba, now president of the Nigerian Bar Association, was the first president. UAD withdrew its participation from the constitution-making organization Pronaco, which Aremu termed as "imposing" its constitution on civil society.

¶3. (SBU) After the April elections, the UAD saw a need to engage and empower the populace, Aremu said, as voting is different from a willingness to defend their vote. Voters needed to understand a participatory democracy meant more than voting, as Aremu characterized the populace as apathetic

and lacking a "sustained culture of resistance against injustice". Aremu suggested mass voter education to engage the 85 percent of the population working in the informal sector, and to target local government. On the local level, government officials make their decisions without any public input. Aremu contrasted this situation with the market, where traders form associations and make decisions democratically. Aremu advocated action now, to engage the people before the next election. Voter education would enhance a true devolution of power in Nigeria, Aremu said. Voter education would lead voters to protest local government actions that affect them on a daily basis, Aremu speculated, and this would help them realize they already hold a stake in the government. UAD had already initiated a program of political education in the local markets, where UAD holds classes every Thursday morning during the market sanitation period.

14. (C) In contrast, the ruling elite consciously disenfranchised the public by doing much of the voter registration by the parties. When the parties conducted voter education, their main objective of voter education was to make them subservient, Aremu commented.

Corruption Has Broken Values
and Produced Subservience

15. (C) Currently Nigeria suffers from a breakdown of its values which leads to celebrating or encouraging the corruption which permeates all levels of society, remarked Aremu. Hoarding funds and then distributing it in largesse is the political currency, Aremu explained, with greater naira amounts a signal of a politician's enhanced standing. The ruling elite used ethnicity and religion differences to

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exacerbate divisions, but Aremu did not believe the ethnic differences were insurmountable, claiming the UAD had representation in all regions of the country and had made a commitment to strengthen its state chapters.

Grassroots Activity Leads to Protests in Osun

16. (C) When Poloff asked about the absence of a mass civil society protest to the April elections, Aremu deflected the question and instead spoke about UAD's political monitoring group, deployed to Anambra and Osun states. In Anambra the dominant People's Democratic Party (PDP) was too frightened to even hold a vote, Aremu said. Osun State Governor Olagunsoye Oyinlola failed to win a single ward in Oshogbo, observed Aremu, and the people decided themselves that PDP candidate Oyinlola had lost the election.

17. (C) What sparked the violence in Osun were not the mobilization efforts of the ruling party or even the opposition, but a spontaneous reaction of the people when they realized the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was creating results, commented Aremu. Action Congress (AC) candidate Rauf Aregbesola emphasized political awareness and mass mobilization, and this plus the work of the UAD had contributed to the spontaneous protests. After the election, it was common people without ties to the opposition who brought evidence of voter fraud to the UAD, and even provided food and support to UAD monitors. The popular protests led to retaliation by the ruling party, but these actions by the ruling party would compel people to armed violence in the future, predicted Aremu.

Comment

18. (C) Aremu adds an interesting if incomplete analysis on the April elections. Voter disenfranchisement was not solely a product of poor voter education. The PDP's superior organization and above all control of INEC and the security forces allowed them to dominate the outcome of the April elections, and made popular engagement relatively unimportant. While voter education would certainly help, it is one matter to educate voters and another to form an effective national grass-roots organization across Nigeria's fractured ethnic and religious lines. Mass protest is still beyond the capacity of civil society activity, which continues to operate largely separate from the populace and concentrated in the major cities. Nonetheless, voter education is something which is sorely needed to create a more participatory democracy.

MCCONNELL